The Report of the Group on Telecom & IT Convergence in this regard is, however, awaited.

Private participation in Internet Telephony

*354. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are considering to legalise Internet Telephony as it will be a low cost alternative for domestic and international long distance calls in the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the private entrepreneurs can also enter into Internet Telephony; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN): (a) to (d) While at present, in accordance with the New Telecom Policy (NTP-99), Internet Telephony is not permitted, Government is also required under this policy to monitor technological innovations and their impact on national development and review this issue at an appropriate time. Accordingly, Government have constituted an Expert Group to review the matter. The report of the Groups is awaited.

Financing of private sector projects by OIDB

*355. DR. A.K. PATEL: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether OIDB's charter permit them to finance projects implemented by private sector companies;

(b) if so, the names of the private sector companies which have received financing from OIDB;

(c) the details of pending applications with OIDB from private sector companies for financing their projects; and

(d) whether Government are averse to OIDB financing projects by private sector companies who are committing large resources for Indian Oil sector?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI RAM NAIK): (a) Under Oil Industry (Development) Act (OID Act), 1974, and the Rules made thereunder, Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) is authorized to provide financial and other assistance for the promotion of all such measures as are, in its opinion conducive to the development of oil industry;

(b) The following non-Government companies (joint ventures of PSUs) have received financial assistance from (OIDB);

(i) Indraprastha Gas Ltd. (IGL), New Delhi.

(ii) Mahanagar Gas Ltd. (MGL), Mumbai.

(iii) Balmer Lawrie Freight Containers Ltd. (BLFC), Chennai

(c) and (d) As per OID Act, 1974, OIDB decides the policy for financing of projects of oil industry. OIDB have received applications from M/s. Mangalore Refinery & Petrochemical Ltd. (MRPL) and M/s. Essar Oil Ltd. (EOL) seeking loan assistance for their refinery projects.

Measures to reduce NPAs of banks

*356. SHRI NARENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether in July, 2000 State-owned banks had set an ambitious target of recovering Rs. 10,000 crores to lower net Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) ratio; if so, how much amount has been recovered during the last six months;

(b) whether any study has been made about the occurrence pattern of NPAs and whether the banks have introduced any preventive measures so that NPAs could be reduced in future; and

(c) what is the present status of NPAs of the State-owned banks, bank-wise as on 31st December, 2000?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALA SAHEB VIKHE-PATIL): (a) Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued guidelines in July, 2000 to all public sector banks for recovery of dues relating to Non-Performing Assets (NPAs), through a simplified, non-discretionary and non-discriminatory mechanism. While no targets were set, the Banks were